

How to Write an MG Novel

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/write-mg-novel/>

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What exactly is an MG Novel - this form that sits smack in-between the Chapter Book and the YA Novel?

MG Novels have been somewhat neglected in the past, but these days, it's exactly what agents and publishers are looking for - with a vengeance.

MG stands for Middle Grade, or books for kids in 3rd-7th grades. Translated to ages, it's for kids roughly 9-15. (Note: there is some overlap with chapter book readers.)

Thematically, MG Novels can go in any direction. This is where there is a clear departure from chapter books: the material is more serious, often involving more historical information, and the characters are more complex and flawed.

Those characters also have back story that delves further and deeper into how that personal history affects them emotionally. So emotions are also more complex.

Another big change is that the primary characters can be and often are in life-threatening situations. Not that they have to be, but this is something you'll *never* find in a chapter book. So what else is different? Let's bang it out.

How is the MG Novel NOT a Chapter Book?

Most MG Novels have only one illustration at the beginning of each chapter (oftentimes just one illustration that is used over and over). Sometimes, they include more than that (as sometimes happens with YA Novels, too).

Chapter Books have 1-4 unique black-and-white illustrations in each chapter, so the artwork is a much more integral aspect of the storytelling process.

The MG Novel is about kids who are older, so their language reflects that and so does the grammar. Sentences are longer and more complex.

How is the MG Novel NOT a YA Novel?

YA Novels are really about teenagers who are full swing in their teens (16 and up). The themes and actions reflect that maturity. That means sexuality and dating (or the hope of dating) plays a pretty important part of the story.

Middle Grade Novels may include a protagonist observing a slightly older character dating and it may even show the inklings of that protagonist having special feelings for someone. But it's too soon to have a real relationship. Kids at this age still play.

Age is vitally important in an MG novel. It's less important in the YA novel, though it's still important enough for it to be clearly delineated. (We have to know how old the characters are, and very specifically.)

MG novels can have a sense of danger, but it shouldn't be over-the-top and there should never be any gore.

YA novels can be over-the-top, though there is a border. Stay away from overly gory material. That's more suitable to graphic novels and novels for adults – or New Adult Novels.

New Adult is YA with sex and gore. That's about it. This is a fairly new trend that's come around because of the popularity of certain YA Novels amongst adults (aged 20 and up). Many publishing professionals cringe about this new category.

What I suspect may be happening is that mature readers who want a simpler vocabulary to stay engaged are buying New Adult. If my guess is right, New Adult may be here to stay.

MG Novel Format

When writing your first MG Novel, it might help you to write the story in the format in which it will be printed. Here's a run-down of how a novel for middle graders should look:

- MG novels usually have 20-26 chapters.
- Each chapter is about 6-12 pages.
- A chapter book is less than 300 pages (almost always). Some are less than 100 pages.
- Each chapter begins with an illustration, all black and white. In some MG novels (but not all) there are additional illustrations dispersed randomly (and sparingly) through the book.
- The font style should be simple to read; the norm is Times New Roman.
- The font size is 14, typically.
- The language style is conversational and appropriate to that age group, though higher vocabulary terms are now included every so often.
- The protagonist is always a kid, somewhere within the age range of the readers (9-15).
- Anyone with a level B-2 English ability can get through the book with the help of a dictionary from time to time.

Writing Quality

Middle Grade doesn't mean average level. It should be crafted with the same care and attention that any other excellent story would be told.

What is your favorite Middle Grade Novel or series? Write below, let me know - or, as ever, send me an email. I love getting great recommendations.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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